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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ZAGREB 000393

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/21/2013

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [HR](#) [PREL](#) [HR](#) [IZ](#) [IZPGOV](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQ: JUST ANOTHER POLITICAL FOOTBALL FOR CROATIAN POLS

REF: ZAGREB 297 AND PREVIOUS

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CLASSIFIED BY: POLOFF A.F.GODFREY FOR REASONS 1.5 (B,D)

SUMMARY

11. (C) A FEBRUARY 18 JOINT SESSION OF THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY COMMITTEES OF THE CROATIAN PARLIAMENT FAILED TO SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY LINE ON IRAQ. PREDICTABLY, THE FAILURE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IRAQ, BUT WITH THE COALITION'S INCOMPETENCE AND THE OPPOSITION'S OPPORTUNISM. SINCE THE SESSION PRODUCED NO CONCRETE RESULT, PARLIAMENT SPEAKER ZLATKO TOMCIC WILL LIKELY CALL FOR A BROADER DEBATE OF THE GOC IRAQ POLICY DURING THE NEXT PLENARY SESSION OF THE SABOR, WHICH MAY TURN OUT TO BE EVEN MORE DISRUPTIVE. WHILE PM RACAN AND SOME OTHERS (INCLUDING WE) TRY TO STEER THE DEBATE IN CROATIA TO SADDAM AND IRAQ, MOST OF THE POLITICAL CHATTERING CLASS HERE CONTINUES TO FOCUS ON HOW THE GOC'S POLICY STATEMENTS ON IRAQ WILL AFFECT CROATIA'S APPLICATION FOR EU MEMBERSHIP AND ON VARIOUS POLITICAL PARTIES' FORTUNES IN AN ELECTION YEAR. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) THE GOC DECISION TO JOIN THE VILNIUS-10 DECLARATION OF SUPPORT TO THE USG INTERPRETATION OF IRAQ'S NONCOMPLIANCE WITH UNSCR 1441 TOOK MOST OF CROATIA'S POLITICAL LEADERS BY SURPRISE. WHILE MESIC TOOK THE CABINET'S ABRUPT POLICY CHOICE MORE OR LESS IN HIS STRIDE, THE PARLIAMENT (SABOR) GOT ITS NOSE OUT OF JOINT. INSISTING ON ITS CONSTITUTIONAL PREROGATIVE AS CROATIA'S SUPREME POLITICAL BODY, THE SABOR SCHEDULED A JOINT SESSION OF THE COMMITTEES ON NATIONAL SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS (REFTEL). THE MEETING WAS

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DELAYED A WEEK AS THE PM WAS BUSY ABROAD DRUMMING UP SUPPORT FOR CROATIA'S EU BID, BUT IT FINALLY CONVENED IN CLOSED (BUT VERY LEAKY) SESSION ON FEBRUARY 18. IN ADVANCE OF THE MEETING, THE EMBASSY PROVIDED BOTH COMMITTEES TRANSLATIONS OF SECRETARY POWELL'S FEBRUARY 5 INTERVENTION AT THE UN SECURITY

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COUNCIL AND SEVERAL OTHER SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS.

13. (C) AS THE COALITION HOLDS A SLIM MAJORITY IN BOTH COMMITTEES, THE OUTCOME OF THE VOTE SHOULD HAVE BEEN A FOREGONE CONCLUSION. ANTE MARKOV (HSS), CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY COMMITTEE, MADE SURE OF ALL OF HIS VOTES WELL IN ADVANCE OF THE MEETING (WE HAD ADMONISHED HIM NOT TO PLAY POLITICS ON IRAQ - REFTEL).

14. (C) ZDRAVKO TOMAC, WHO CHAIRS THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE AND IS A MEMBER OF PM RACAN'S SDP, FAILED TO ENSURE THAT ALL OF THE MEMBERS OF HIS COMMITTEE WHO ARE ON THE COALITION WERE PRESENT AT THE MEETING. TOMAC HAS BEEN A RIGHT-WING, KNOW-IT-ALL IRRITANT TO RACAN WITHIN THE SDP SINCE THE COALITION CAME TO POWER IN 2000, BUT THE PM -- WHO IS ALSO PRESIDENT OF THE SDP -- HAS NOT DONE ANYTHING TO BRING HIM INTO LINE. IN THE RUNUP TO THIS JOINT COMMITTEE SESSION, TOMAC THREATENED TO QUIT THE SDP (AFTER HIS SISTER WAS FIRED FROM HER POSITION AS ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR VETERANS AFFAIRS).

15. (C) THE OPPOSITION HDZ, WHICH REMAINS LARGEY UNRECONSTRUCTED FROM THE CORRUPT, NATIONALIST DAYS OF PRESIDENT TUDJMAN, HAS TAKEN A STRONG POSITION IN SUPPORT OF USG EFFORTS ON IRAQ. BUT WITHOUT ALL OF THE COALITION COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT, THE OPPOSITION COULD NOT PASS UP

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THE CHANCE TO DELIVER A POLITICAL DEFEAT TO PM RACAN. THE OPPOSITION ABSTAINED FROM THE COMMITTEE VOTE, WHICH MEANT THAT WITH TWO FRINGE-PARTY VOTES AGAINST AND TWO COALITION VOTES PLAYING HOOKY, THE COMMITTEE DID NOT SUPPORT THE GOC POSITION.

15. (C) IN A FEBRUARY 19 POST-MORTEM MEETING, OPPOSITION MP AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE MEMBER VESNA SKARE-OZBOLT SHEEPISHLY ADMITTED TO US THAT THE ONLY REASON THE HDZ AND HER PARTY, THE RIGHT-OF-CENTER DEMOCRATIC CENTER (DC), VOTED

AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT POSITION WAS ELECTION-YEAR POLITICS. THE DECISION TO ABSTAIN WAS MADE ON THE DAY OF THE COMMITTEE MEETING, WHEN HDZ PRESIDENT SANADER COUNTED NOSES AND SAW THAT THE COALITION WOULD LOSE WITHOUT THEM. THE HDZ, WHICH IS DESPERATE TO GET THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY (AND ESPECIALLY THE USG) TO GIVE ITS SEAL OF APPROVAL TO ITS FAR-FROM-COMPLETE INTERNAL REFORM PROCESS, PHONED POLOFF AFTER THE VOTE TO TRY AND REASSURE US THAT THE HDZ POSITION ON IRAQ REMAINS STAUNCHLY PRO-USG. THE HDZ ISSUED A PRESS RELEASE THE FOLLOWING DAY WITH THE SAME MESSAGE, BUT ADDING A LINE ESSENTIALLY SAYING THAT IT IS NOT THE OPPOSITION'S RESPONSIBILITY TO DELIVER THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY.

COMMENT

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AF-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	INL-00
	SRPP-00	DS-00	FBIE-00	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00
	LAB-01	L-00	VCE-00	AC-01	NEA-00	NRRC-00	NSAE-00
	NSCE-00	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00
	P-00	SCT-00	SP-00	SSO-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	EPAE-00
	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-01	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00
	SWCI-00	/005W					

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O 211400Z FEB 03
FM AMEMBASSY ZAGREB
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9513
INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY LJUBLJANA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY SKOPJE PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TIRANA PRIORITY
USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY
SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

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[16.](#) (C) NO FOLLOW-UP MEETING TO THE JOINT SESSION HAS BEEN SCHEDULED, BUT IT IS UNLIKELY THAT PARLIAMENT SPEAKER ZLATKO TOMCIC (HSS) WILL LET THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY CHOICE STAND WITHOUT THE SABOR MARKING ITS TERRITORY. RIGHT NOW, THE COALITION PARTIES HAVE SUSPENDED THEIR DIFFERENCES IN ORDER TO PRESENT A UNITED FRONT AS CROATIA SUBMITS ITS APPLICATION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION (SIGNED ON FEBRUARY 20 AND SCHEDULED FOR DELIVERY IN ATHENS ON FEBRUARY 21). BUT IT WON'T BE LONG BEFORE THE BELL RINGS TO SIGNAL THE BEGINNING OF THE NEXT ROUND, AND IRAQ WILL CONTINUE TO BE THE HOTTEST POLITICAL POTATO IN ZAGREB. DESPITE POSSIBLE REPERCUSSIONS OUTSIDE OF CROATIA, POLITICIANS HERE WILL USE THIS ISSUE TO GAIN ADVANTAGE OVER THEIR OPPONENTS IN THIS ELECTION YEAR.
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